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# LITURGY AS CURRICULUM: THE DYNAMICS OF LITURGICAL EDUCATION

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*Most Catholic schools avail themselves of many opportunities during the academic year to gather for an all-school Mass. Select teachers and students typically plan the liturgy and execute the needed ministries during Mass. This article situates liturgy planning and celebration in the context of the formal curriculum and calls for explicit liturgical education in Catholic schools. One Catholic high school's experience with a "showcase liturgy" concept is described in detail.*

One concern heard in episcopal and clerical circles about Catholic schools is that their students, especially as they get older, do not attend the parish Eucharistic liturgy. If Catholic schools are to prepare youngsters for adult membership in the Church, then one of the outcomes of a Catholic education would be their participation in the local parish Eucharist. While many reasons can be adduced for the declining attendance at Sunday Mass, one reason might be that schools have not developed in their students an understanding of and participation in the Eucharistic liturgy which the Church is proposing for all her members. This essay postulates how schools might further that understanding and participation and offers a case study of a Catholic high school that illustrates some possible strategies for other schools to adopt and adapt.

In her book *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, Harris (1989) proposes that education in the Church takes five forms: *didache*—teaching; *koinonia*—community life; *leiturgia*—worship, prayer, ritual; *kerygma*—preaching, proclamation, storytelling; and *diakonia*—service of the other, of the community. This suggests that liturgy ought to be a part of the Catholic school's curriculum. Liturgy means the Eucharist especially, but

is not exclusive of other liturgies or what are often referred to as liturgical services. These other liturgies can be various ritual celebrations of important events or circumstances or meanings in the community. All-school assemblies are ritual activities that may highlight an important event or a speaker with a special message. School rallies before big games are rituals of community spirit. Graduation ceremonies, awards ceremonies, school fairs, and parent appreciation events are ways in which we ritually and symbolically celebrate something of great value and meaning. A defining feature of these rituals is that they are performed by the community to express a communal meaning, belief, or commitment. One problem with the more traditional parish or school Eucharistic liturgy is that the community often does not play an active part; rather, they attend or hear the Mass, which is performed by the priestly celebrant.

Recent scholarship has recovered an earlier sense of the active participation of the liturgical assembly in enacting the Eucharist (Rausch, 1996). The *General Instruction*, which introduces the *Roman Missal* (revised by the Second Vatican Council in 1970), views the entire assembly as the primary agent of the Eucharistic liturgical action (Rausch, 1996). Rausch cites the work of Congar and Legrand, which documents the patristic view that the total assembly celebrates the Eucharist with its president. Only in the 11th and 12th centuries did the understanding of priesthood emerge which highlights the priest's role in the celebration of the Eucharist.

If the present orthodox view of the Eucharistic liturgy emphasizes the involvement of the whole assembly, then Catholic schools ought to be teaching young people how to participate fully in the celebration. This means helping them to bring their own concerns to the Eucharist and shaping the ritual expression by using their language, music, and ritual gestures and performances within the Eucharistic liturgy. After all, the Church is encouraging a greater enculturation of liturgical expression in various non-Western countries so that the Eucharist can be celebrated in the native language, using native music and dance and other artistic media within the liturgy itself. There is a teenage subculture in the United States and in other Western countries, with its own language, music, and other expressive media. Why should young people be excluded from the Church's desire for local liturgy to express local concerns, life experiences, language, and cultural artifacts?

To return to the Eucharistic assembly and its active role in the Eucharist, it is important, as Cooke (1997) reminds us, that the assembly be aware of what it is doing. If the assembly does not understand the words it utters or recites, it cannot enter into the making of the Eucharist. To elaborate on a comment by Harris (1989), schools must educate young people to enact the Eucharist so the Eucharist can educate them. As Cooke suggests, this enactment involves a profound dialogue of presence: the assembly to their risen Lord, and the risen Lord to them. The assembly must know that the Eucharist

is something that Christ, the risen Lord, effects. They know him in the breaking of the bread, as he reveals himself to them as risen Lord in their midst, as God's word of love dwelling with them always. In the Eucharist, he represents himself to his disciples, reminding them to reflect on his teaching and to remember his words and actions, not simply at the Last Supper, but throughout his life ("Do this in memory of me" [Luke 22:19b]). Thus, the readings from the Gospels refresh the assembly's memory about Jesus' words and actions. The reflection and homily help the assembly to bring home the message of Jesus' words and actions.

In turn, the Eucharistic assembly of teachers and students must learn that they, as the present community of believers, perform the liturgy. By their faith in Jesus, they make him present in their midst. The presider has a distinct function within the ritual, but he does this as a member of that community who is making Christ present.

Cooke (1997) goes on to clarify that the faith of the assembly must continue to grow in its understanding of its relationship to God in Christ. That growth in understanding enables the assembly to perform the Eucharist with greater depth and to be educated by the Eucharist concerning the richness and depth of life. Thus, faith should include the belief that life, individually and collectively, is a sacrament. God becomes present in the world through humanity, through the ordinary things we do in our everyday lives. As the disciples grow in appreciation of themselves as sacrament, then they can turn toward Jesus' example and teaching and translate that into their present circumstances as a way to express God more fully in the ordinary activities of their lives. Having grown to appreciate their own sacramentality, they approach the Eucharist deeply aware that they are entering into a community celebration of their sacramentality—that through this action of listening to God's word and of enacting the supper of Jesus they are enhancing their awareness of his active presence in their individual and communal lives. But in celebrating the Eucharist, they must bring their own expression of their sense of being a sacrament to the Eucharist; they must make the Eucharist through an authentic expression of their own, in song, in prayer, in gesture. They must talk to one another of the mystery they encounter in the center of their lives; share their problems and struggles, seeking support and understanding; and confess their frailties and ask for forgiveness.

In these kinds of celebrations, participants' awareness of the presence of the risen Jesus in their lives as the expression of God's creating and saving love is enhanced—not by using a language or ritual that is inauthentic, a robotic kind of enactment, but by speaking in their own language, using metaphors, imagery, music, and gesture that express who they are and what they are thinking and feeling about their lives.

Entering into the Eucharist with attentiveness to the words of Jesus, his saints, and his church, the Eucharistic assembly hears Jesus telling them to

forgive, to be just, to go the extra mile for others, and to take care of those who suffer physical, emotional, and cultural pain and abandonment. Listening to his words, encountering him in the Eucharist, we learn not only to remember what he taught and what he did, but to do likewise. Hence the Eucharist continues in the actions of the assembly's lives that follow the moments of Eucharist. They are drawn more fully into an enactment of their sacramentality by acting like Jesus in the ordinary events of their lives by bringing the mind of Christ to their work, to their relationships, and to the challenges and disappointments they face.

What does this imply for Catholic school educators? It implies that school liturgies ought to involve the students and faculty in the music, gesture, sharing of faith, communal reflections on the readings, and translation of the themes of the readings into appropriate musical and artistic expression. The ritual must be a manifestation of them. Students must meet Jesus on their own terms of understanding and their own level of faith development. Hence the liturgical celebration, while it will contain the essential elements common to liturgical practice throughout the Church, will also be expressive of the local context, local issues, and local sensibilities.

This is particularly important in girls' Catholic schools. Because males, using male language, imagery, and sensibilities, have traditionally enacted the liturgy, liturgies for and by females should be expressive of their issues, sensibilities, metaphors, and imagery.

Furthermore, Catholic schools should work on designing special liturgical services for many occasions. Patron saints' days, various national theme weeks or months, and special events traditionally celebrated at the school should be ritualized, enacting Eucharist-like reflections on the sacramentality of the words and actions of Jesus and reminding participants of their struggles to make that sacramentality intentional in their everyday lives. By such liturgical rituals, the students and faculty will bring to their celebrations of the Eucharist a much livelier sense of participation, awareness of themselves as a community of disciples, and openness to expressing their faith authentically in word, music, and gesture.

For Catholic school educators, the sense of the sacramentality of their lives should penetrate the sense of their ministry of teaching, so they see that in the very act of bringing youngsters to insight about how a piece of history or science or literature reveals an important aspect of the human, natural, or cosmic world, they are bringing them closer to an understanding of how God works in human affairs and how God speaks to students about himself through poetry, physics, geography, or a foreign language. What teachers bring to the Eucharist is something very special: the hard and exhausting work of cultivating young minds and emotions. They should celebrate their successes, ask pardon for being an obstacle to their students' learning, and seek support in their efforts to make the learning as exciting and enriching as

possible. In the Eucharist, teachers encounter Christ the teacher who asks them to remember his lessons of word, action, and example. He also reminds them that when he was a boy he went to the priests and teachers of the law to try to understand what they were teaching. He reminds them that he is in their students, challenging them, asking tough questions, trying to connect the lesson with life.

Thus, when we speak of liturgy as curriculum, we can begin to see how that curriculum encompasses the entire work of the school: the curricula of academic coursework, community building, community service and social justice, religious education, and personal growth.

While all of this might sound fine in theory, what would it look like in practice? What follows is a case study of a school that approached what is previously suggested. Although this case describes a high school, attempts to develop a curriculum of liturgy have also been made in elementary schools (Attfield, 1993). The school described below is not an ideal school. Neither did the leaders of the school sit down ahead of time to figure out how to design and implement such a curriculum. Rather, what happened was a gradual evolution with decisions made more by intuition than by foresight. As is usually the case, some teachers had a better idea of how to develop this curriculum of liturgy than others; nevertheless, the initiatives of the liturgy team would not have borne fruit if many other elements in the school had not already been in place. We will simply call the school St. Grace High.

## ST. GRACE HIGH

St. Grace is a Catholic high school blessed with some extraordinary teachers, many extraordinary students, a curriculum with sufficient breadth and flexibility, and a chapel that has been renovated for use as a theater as well as for liturgies of various sizes and shapes. If this school lacked any of these essential ingredients, it could not host what has been an exceptional series of student-designed liturgies. This is a story of a real school with all the messiness, ambivalence, irrationality, and goodwill of most schools. Its story might help us realize how school liturgies can become genuine expressions of student and teacher worship and at the same time, culminating expressions of disparate learnings developed in separate academic areas. Moreover, the story tells us how learnings in the expressive arts open up space for spiritual growth, which in turn provides substance to the art.

This article now provides a description of the overall climate of the school and then an explanation of the curriculum and the thinking that augmented its development. Subsequently, the teachers and students involved in the planning and execution of the student-designed liturgies will be considered, as well as how the pieces fit together and students' reflections on their learning.

## THE CONTEXT

The school is a fairly traditional college preparatory school for boys. School spirit is strong, even when the normally dominant athletic teams do not produce a winning season. Good faculty-student relationships are a hallmark of the school. Despite their demands on students, the faculty is always willing to spend extra time with them, and it is therefore rare not to find all the teachers somewhere around the school an hour or two after the final bell. The buildings are old and well worn from the buffeting of several generations of young men pounding up and down the stairs, rushing down corridors, and horsing around in the cafeteria. Along with a sense of tradition at the hundred-year-old school, many teachers exhibit openness to trying out new ideas, both within the standard curriculum as well as in cocurricular areas. Senior electives in the English department include film criticism, science fiction, and Latin American literature. The freshman general science course is known for its inventive field trips and classroom exercises dramatizing the principles of gravity, trajectory, and energy and mass. Among its many cocurriculars the school sponsors an outdoor survival club, a model United Nations, a community service program, a big brother program, school carnivals, and student retreats of various sizes and types. Student rowdiness, testing of authority, and student complaints about one thing or another are normal occurrences, but by and large, the atmosphere is filled with lots of banter, some playful teasing, and easy greetings as people pass one another in the corridors.

As the number of priests and brothers on the faculty declines, more lay female faculty are being hired to bring women's voices into the learning environment and to challenge the machismo and blatantly sexist student attitudes that have gone unchallenged. In an attempt to bring a more ecumenical voice to the faculty, some non-Catholic teachers have been hired. They are expected to be as committed to the spiritual growth of the students as the Catholic teachers. Generally, the younger teachers are a more diverse group, but one that brings additional energies, perspectives, and talents to the instructional mix.

A new principal has brought fresh thinking about the school's curriculum. He engages both new and veteran teachers in the exploration of an enriched curriculum that could increase student commitment to the learning agenda of the school. Visual arts have been added as a requirement for all ninth graders, and a semester of studio drama was added for tenth graders. Art electives, including a Saturday music program, were also added.

Community service is a requirement for graduation. A course in Social Justice and Social Responsibility, with connections to the community service programs, is part of the senior religion program. An expanded career exploration program was added as a series of mini-courses open to students in all four years. Besides the more traditional careers in law, medicine, architec-

ture, and engineering, careers in the performing arts are also explored. For 11th graders, a joint course in American history and literature includes new themes dealing with religious intolerance, racism, social responsibility, and ecumenism. A more flexible yearly calendar as well as a weekly and daily schedule have been introduced.

## A TURNING POINT

Some students in the senior art elective proposed the idea of using an opaque projector to display the works of various artists on the spacious cafeteria walls and then to paint in their own color scheme. Not only did the new art work convert a blandly colored wall into a series of attractive works of art, it added a tone of student-imposed civility to the lunch room. No one was going to throw food against that wall! This activity planted the idea in the mind of the student body that they might have a say in the use of building space. Shortly after the work on the cafeteria commenced, the senior class officers closed the senior lounge, which is normally a sloppily maintained collection of broken furniture and soda-stained carpets by midyear. They announced that the lounge would remain closed until the seniors devised a plan to police their own behavior and to exclude from the lounge those who trashed the place. Shortly after that, the track team volunteered to work with the coaches one weekend to clean up and paint the locker rooms in the old gym, a somewhat dilapidated structure which was still used for freshman physical education classes and for minor varsity teams. Members of various clubs, not to be outdone by the athletes, decided to repaint and decorate the rooms that housed their meetings.

Schoolwide liturgies were held in the newly constructed gymnasium, while the school chapel, an old prefabricated Butler building from World War II, was used only occasionally for First Friday Mass and homeroom liturgies. After some discussion and some reservations on the part of the veteran faculty, it was decided to convert the old chapel into a well-equipped and tastefully redesigned multipurpose space: for small group liturgies, dramatic productions (the school had previously rented stage space off campus for the annual school play), small special assemblies, drama and music classes, showing films, parent meetings, and guest speakers. The pews were removed and sold for a good price; the altar was simplified and rendered easily movable so that the room could be used for other purposes. The Blessed Sacrament was moved to a smaller chapel on the campus. The floor was carpeted and new wiring installed that could be used both for theater as well as liturgical lighting. Movable partitions, folding chairs, and various-sized platforms were stored in the back, so that various configurations inside the open space could be arranged quite easily. A quiet prayer space, with some floor pillows, was provided for when the room was not otherwise being used.



It was in this context that the ideas for the student-designed liturgies were nurtured. It is important to emphasize that the idea of student-designed liturgies would not have germinated if many of the basic ingredients for such a venture were not partially developed. The curriculum incorporated a variety of electives, mostly for juniors and seniors. Teachers were convinced that the course work, while demanding, had to be of genuine interest to the students. The filmmaking course exposed students to the use of symbol, image, and metaphor in the construction of film as a narrative art form. Students were writing in the school newspaper and creating poems and visual images for the school literary journal. The drama studio had exposed students to the basic technologies of the stage, to the discipline of body and voice to convey mood and character, and to spontaneous fantasy in improvisational exercises. The American history and American literature courses had helped students appreciate the realities of the historical context as it shaped the literary art of the period; helped them appreciate how the religious consciousness of the people seeped into their stories, poems, music, and social policies. The art program had exposed them to the skills of visual expression and the experience of the aesthetics of spaces. The generally supportive relationships with the faculty enabled students to try things out without fear of censure or ridicule. Because the faculty supported one another's cocurricular programs, the students likewise found it easier to cross the boundaries of their tightly knit groups. The art students made the posters that graced the hallways the week before a big football game, urging the team to victory. The athletes loved the posters. Student turnouts for drama productions were high. Again, it is doubtful the students could have imagined that they could have a say in the way students worshiped at school, had not all the other initiatives at the school been under way.

## THE CELEBRATION COURSE

One of the priests on the faculty who taught English and American Literature classes went to the principal with the art and drama teachers (one of them a non-Catholic) and asked if they could team-teach a course on liturgy. They wanted to involve the students in bringing art and drama into the liturgy. Besides designing liturgies that the class would celebrate, the group broached the idea of a "showcase liturgy" that the liturgy class would design for the entire student body, or at least for those who wished to participate. The renovated multipurpose building would be an ideal space for holding this class since it was equipped with a new sound and lighting system and it allowed for a flexible arrangement of space. With the encouragement of the principal and the department chair, the course was approved by the curriculum committee. The course was advertised at registration time and enough junior and senior students signed up for it to be scheduled for the fall semester.

Until that time, one area that was fairly uniformly unsupported among the students was the liturgy. Daily liturgies might attract two or three students; First Fridays, maybe a dozen. One of the main reasons for this disinterest was that it was an activity in which their active participation seemed minimal. Most students commented that “Mass is boring.” It was hoped that the new course would change that attitude.

The new liturgy course was called “Celebration.” It was a full-year course, open to juniors and seniors. During the course students learned about sacramental theology and studied the history of the liturgy. They celebrated a Latin High Mass, with incense, Gregorian chant, and the old, stiff vestments of gold brocade. They spent some time studying the close connection between liturgy and drama in the Middle Ages—the use of mystery and morality plays to instruct the faithful in the biblical stories and moral teachings of the Church. They also began to connect celebrations such as Halloween, Carnival, or Mardi Gras with the liturgical cycle.

With some apprehension the faculty and administration gathered shortly before Thanksgiving for the initial schoolwide showcase liturgy. The students in the Celebration course had chosen as the theme for the liturgy *The Giving Tree*. The chapel space had been carefully arranged. Students sat on the carpeted floor. The altar was set on a stage a few feet above the floor, with a stage-prop tree off to the side. Upon entering the softly lit space, participants heard music playing gently in the background, with lyrics of popular singers about friendship, loneliness, and loyalty.

Once everyone had taken their places, the lights were dimmed for about a minute, while the assembly quieted down. The lights came up and the story of *The Giving Tree* was enacted. Lighting and music were skillfully employed to mark the transitions in the story. When the play was over, the celebrant led the group in the prayer of forgiveness, asking pardon for taking so much for granted in life, from parents and friends, from nature, from God. Brief scripture readings were taken from the Book of Genesis about God’s creation, and the placing of humans in the Garden of Eden. Since the dramatic performance had constituted the homily, the celebrant said only a few words about the constancy and unconditional nature of God’s love that was revealed in the gifts of nature, family, and friends, and about the call to imitate that love. At the Offertory, students from the Celebration class brought small gifts of their own and placed them around the altar—a few pieces of pottery, some sketches, a watercolor, and some photographs. These student-constructed artifacts were placed on display in the library, along with a watercolor of the giving tree, for the next month.

Because attendance at the liturgy was optional (students could use the library or study hall as another option), the first showcase liturgy drew only about a third of the student body. The response was so favorable, however, that the next one was much better attended. The showcase liturgy for the sec-

ond semester, held during Easter season, dealt with the theme of sight. This second liturgy really set the standard for subsequent student-designed liturgies.

## THE LITURGY OF SIGHT

Students entered a completely dark chapel. They were blindfolded, and instructed to hold onto the hand of a fellow student in groups of four or five. Each group was then led by a member of the liturgy class to the back third of the chapel through a darkened maze constructed of movable partitions. Crowded into this smaller space, the students were instructed to remove their blindfolds. The room was then dimly lit while they watched a student-constructed "film" on seeing. The film was a lengthy series of pages scotch-taped together and run through an opaque projector sending its images against a sheet hung from the back wall. The pages contained short poems about seeing, with a voice on a tape recorder reading the poems. The poems were interspersed with pictures of sunsets, flowers, smiling faces of people of various ages and colors, students reading in the library, stars in the firmament, and various visual works of art. The lights were extinguished, and the students were instructed to put their blindfolds back on. They were then led to the larger part of the chapel where, with some bumping into one another, they were told to sit on the floor and wait in silence for a full minute before they were instructed to remove their blindfolds.

The lights came on dimly, and a spotlight shone on a student dressed in brightly colored clothing. The student read the Gospel account of the disciples encountering the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus. After a minute of silence after the reading of the Gospel passage, the spotlight swung to each of three students who spoke about seeing. The first spoke about the wonder of the gift of physical sight and about learning to look at things closely, to get beyond the casual glance to notice the uniqueness of each person's face, each cloud, each flower, each pebble. He also spoke of seeing things in perspective, about being in the mountains and realizing how small his life must look against that power and grandeur, and then at night realizing how tiny the mountains themselves looked in comparison to the enormous space of the universe.

The second student spoke about seeing values and virtues in other people, his fellow students seeing beyond the squabbles with their parents to the care and concern they had for their sons; and seeing beyond the unknown stranger's appearance to recognize someone like themselves, seeing in a painful or upsetting event a new challenge, a new lesson.

The third student spoke of seeing beyond the everydayness of experience to the working of God in our lives, whether that working was simply in the functioning of our bodily health, the gift of understanding something in sci-

ence class, the gift of a friend or even of an enemy. He concluded by speaking directly to the Gospel passage, about finding Jesus in other people, especially in unexpected people in school, and finding him now, at this Eucharist. Each mini-sermon was delivered with the customary unease of a teenage boy speaking in front of his peers about "spiritual stuff," with shuffling of the feet, constant rubbing of the nose, some scratching of the back of the head, in a tone of voice much more apologetic than assertive. And, of course, it was all the more convincing to the assembly.

The offertory prayers contained references to offering the gifts of seeing so that God might clarify, deepen, and enrich the sight of all. During the silence after Communion, slides of family picnics, mountain scenery, circus performers, youngsters competing in Special Olympics, old men on Skid Row, teenagers dancing, and clouds were projected on a screen to the side of the altar, while the hymn "Amazing Grace" was played. Then the lights were turned off again, and the final prayer of Thanksgiving for the gift of sight was offered in darkness. The liturgy ended with the boisterous playing of "Let the Sunshine In" from the Broadway show *Hair*.

The liturgy was the topic of conversation for the next few days around the school. Students were clearly moved. Those who had produced the showcase liturgy were surprised to find other students thanking them for the experience and promising to come to the next one. The faculty were themselves struck by the depth of the experience. Most of them had never thought of the possibilities that might arise from participating in the liturgy in this way. They began to talk about planning their homeroom liturgies more carefully with their students. While it is fair to say that the liturgies did not cause a dramatic increase in religious enthusiasm (the faculty and the students were too cool for that), most agreed that the student-designed liturgies added an almost measurable deepening to the human quality of the school. The boys were still impulsive, rowdy, and rebellious. Yet there was an affect about the school, a greater sensitivity on the part of faculty to the potential in the young people they were teaching, a deeper respect, almost, for the latent spirituality and humanity that was maturing in these young men. And in the students themselves, there was a deepening bond of having participated in something very moving, an understanding of a sacred dimension to their lives that was expressible in their own music and imagery. All the other elements of their school life—the friendships, the competitive spirit in the games and contests, the laughter in the cafeteria and the corridors, the insights gained in the classroom, the moments of uncertainty and frustration and even of failure—seemed better grounded because they had this tacitly sacred dimension beneath them.

## LESSONS LEARNED

What do we make of this historical moment in the life of one school? Several comments seem in order. First, the Celebration course was made possible by the imagination and leadership of three dedicated teachers. Without the special blending of their talent, enthusiasm, and expertise, the course would never have been proposed. Talent to enable such liturgies is, to be sure, present in most faculties, but there were other circumstances present in that historical moment that may not be present in schools possessing the faculty talent. A second consideration was the facilitating leadership of the principal. Because he endorsed the new course and the showcase liturgies concept, the necessary administrative supports of scheduling, finances, space allocations, and allocation of faculty work loads were put into place. In other words, the innovation became an accepted feature of the school curriculum and the school calendar. The third circumstance that enabled the liturgy course to take shape was the unique opportunity provided by the renovated chapel. The spatial flexibility of most school chapels is inadequate and they are not equipped to facilitate a variety of artistically designed liturgical features. The ideal is a completely open space that can be configured to accommodate both performance space and audience space, along with flexible lighting and sound arrangements. The fourth circumstance that facilitated the emergence of strong student leadership in the design of the liturgies was the growth in student attitudes of responsible ownership of both their "spaces" in the school and of their learning. This was due, of course, to faculty encouragement of student initiative and choice. In many schools, students are still placed in a predominantly passive role; they have few real choices, academically, culturally, or socially within the boundaries set by the adults in the school. So they don't even imagine what it would be like to own their own worship, let alone the colors on the wall of their cafeteria.

I do not intend to romanticize what happened in this school during those years. There were plenty of the ordinary problems all schools face: a few ineffective teachers who had to be counseled out of teaching; faculty who resisted change; students who resisted continued efforts to get them to do their homework or study for exams; students who repeatedly violated trust agreements with teachers; students who vandalized other students' lockers; and parents who continually complained about one thing or another. In other words, the school had its share of "problem people." Nevertheless, the school was able to move forward in a number of areas in curriculum, student life, community outreach, parent involvement, plant renovation, and faculty development; and within that atmosphere, the liturgy course was accepted as another element. The conditions at the school were not ideal; improvements were developed over the course of multiple and unrelated changes, even while some problems within the school remained seemingly unfixable. On

the other hand, there developed a sense that divisions, frustrations, failures, and resistance make up as much a part of human life to be addressed in liturgy as the flowers and the sunsets and the moments of transformation are to be celebrated. So it may be said that even the messier side of school life was at least minimally transformed by the perspectives and attitudes developed through the liturgies of those years. Beyond that minimal effect, there were substantial and profound student and faculty learnings derived from the liturgies.

## **REFLECTION ON STUDENT AND FACULTY LEARNINGS**

The faculty response to the student-designed liturgies was enthusiastic and positive. In the faculty room, which was usually the place for gripe sessions and for telling stories about the foibles or outrages of miscreant students, the comments after the liturgies reflected surprise at the depth of the experience for them personally and amazement at the inventiveness of the students who organized the liturgies. A few commented on how the liturgies revealed a hitherto undetected spiritual quality of the students who designed them. All commented that they were surprised by the student turnout for the liturgies and the favorable student response. Many commented, both wistfully and fatalistically, how impossible it would be to have similar liturgies at their parish churches, with the afterthought that church attendance would be considerably increased by such liturgies. Most of the teachers made a point of complimenting the three teachers who had designed the Celebration course. Some of the non-Catholic teachers attended the liturgies and found themselves very comfortable with and moved by the liturgies.

For the students who participated in the liturgy course, there were expected academic learnings: understanding the history of the development of the liturgy and its relation to Jewish liturgy and holy feasts, understanding the liturgical cycle and its connection to the cycles of the seasons and the rites of acceptance into church membership, seeing the connection between liturgy and early forms of medieval European drama, and in all of this learning a lot of sacramental theology. Beyond that, the production of liturgy became a spiritually integrating experience through which students could explore the theological meanings of the Scriptures and Church teaching on sacraments as they applied to their lives and try out various images and dramatic presentations of those meanings in their own language and music.

They also recognized the communal experience of Eucharist in a totally new way. They saw how the design features they built into the liturgy could involve the rest of the students in fuller participation and involvement in the liturgy of the word as well as the liturgy of the sacrament. In a sense, they were ministering to their fellow students by the artistic elements they built

into the liturgy. Furthermore, they began to see how naturally art and religious experience blend into one another, how imagination is an integral part of prayer, and how religious experience is mediated through liturgical expression rich in aesthetic elements. They didn't use this analytic language in commenting on their experience, but their productions conveyed tacit understanding. In the more contemporary terminology of "performance assessment," these students performed their knowledge and understanding.

Another important student learning was that involvement at this level of liturgy gave them a whole new sense of membership in a local church. They began to see what was possible in their parishes. They realized how this level of involvement in the liturgy could bring a much deeper integration of their everyday lives and their religious beliefs, and indeed a deeper appreciation of those very beliefs.

There is an old saying among educators: "If you really want to understand something, try teaching it to someone else." In this case, the students came to deeper, multiple understandings about liturgy, art, spirituality, and Church membership by designing liturgies which would in themselves teach the meanings intrinsic to the liturgy as a common prayer. Their exposure to the possibilities of multiple aesthetic elements—music, poetry, color, light, movement, and dramatic tension—equipped them to create the kind of expressive liturgies that brought the Word of God much closer to their congregation than that congregation, by and large, had ever experienced before.

What can be recognized as a kind of spiritual flowering among these students was seeded and cultivated by human antecedents and human accompaniments. The spiritual expressiveness of those liturgies emerged from the human worlds of boys living through adolescence with all its confusion and all its promise: boys living within families with the attendant joys and frustrations of family life, attending a school that provided support, encouragement, and friendship as well as the artistic literacies by which to explore and express their understanding of the Gospel. The rich human texture of their lives and the environments that nurtured those lives were natural sources for God's grace. The Eucharistic liturgies and the other liturgical rituals enacted at the school became culminating expressions of thanksgiving and praise for their graced lives. God's grace can work, of course, in far less promising circumstances. Saints emerge from the most disadvantageous backgrounds. Nonetheless, I believe that schools are supposed to nurture a rich humanity, using all the languages by which grace can be expressed.

## CONCLUSION

I am sure that many other schools are developing a rich curriculum of liturgy. I wonder, however, whether diocesan educational leaders acknowledge their work as real curriculum work or whether it is seen as praiseworthy pas-

toral work but separate from the real curriculum of the school. I suggest that the curriculum of liturgy be given a prominent place at the center of the school's curriculum work, so that it can be understood and practiced as an integrative learning experience.

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